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CHAPTER 14

Improving Career Time Perspective

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Time perspective means a mental picture of the past, present, and future. Career time perspective interventions increase concern about the future and connect present behavior to future goals. Orienting clients to the future and teaching them how to design their futures develops the planning attitudes and skills needed for career choice and adjustment. Time perspective interventions may be used with all clients who want assistance in the process of making decisions about their futures. Interventions that deal with the personal experience of time work best early during the career counseling process because they address fundamental issues and provide a context for other career interventions.

USES OF CAREER TIME PERSPECTIVE INVENTORIES

There are eight major uses of career time perspective inventories:

1. To induce future orientation
2. To foster optimism about the future
3. To make the future feel real
4. To reinforce positive attitudes toward planning

5. To prompt goal setting
6. To link present behavior to future outcomes
7. To practice planning skills
8. To heighten career awareness

BACKGROUND

It is easy to overlook the fact that career planning requires individuals to know that they have careers. Everyone has a career, but not everyone knows that he or she does. Hughes explains this paradox when he distinguishes between *objective* and *subjective* career. He writes that "a career consists, objectively, of a series of status and clearly defined offices. . . . Subjectively, a career is the moving perspective in which the person sees his [or her] life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his [or her] various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to him [or her]" (Hughes, 1958, p. 63). Thus an individual's objective career is externally observable because it consists of the series of positions occupied during his or her life cycle. In contrast, an individual's subjective career is not externally observable because it consists of thoughts about the vocational past, present, and future. Everyone has an objective career but not everyone conceives a subjective career.

To experience a subjective career, people must be able to remember the past and anticipate the future. People who can only think about the present, for whatever reason, do not have a subjective career. They cannot recognize the links that connect their vocational past, present, and future. Recollecting the past and anticipating the future allows people to recognize their subjective careers. People who can adopt the perspective of three different time dimensions have more vantage points from which to observe their own vocational behavior. The way in which they develop their careers depends on which time perspective (i.e., past, present, or future) they adopt when they make career choices and work. A counselor who knows a client's time orientation— that is, which of the three time dimensions takes precedence in decision making—can better understand that client's career concerns and reactions to career counseling.

Some people orient their career decision making to the future. They make choices based on what will be best in the future rather than what is best today or was best in the past. People who orient themselves to the future worry about what they will do in the future. To reduce their anxiety about the future, they prepare for tomorrow by working hard in school and by making occupational plans. They often seek career counseling as

a way of designing their occupational futures. Typical career interventions empower these clients to increase their sense of self-efficacy, use decision-making skills, and form career plans.

Other people orient their career decision making to the past. They are more concerned about family traditions and pursuing proper occupations. When they envision the future, they usually view their prospects as a repetition of the past but with themselves playing roles once played by other people. They typically do not seek career counseling about occupational choice. If they request career counseling, then they usually want assistance in making plans to achieve their "inherited" goals or help in solving problems that block goal attainment.

Still other people orient their career decision making to the present. They are more concerned with survival issues such as securing food and shelter or with distractions that offer quick payoffs and short-term gratification. The future does not interest people who are "stuck in the present". Present-oriented people rarely seek career counseling to discuss their futures. When they do seek career counseling, they want help in finding a job now.

Traditional career counseling interventions work well with future-oriented clients. Unfortunately, these interventions do not work well with clients who are oriented toward the past or present. Career interventions such as interest inventory administration and interpretation lack meaning for these clients because they know that their future will repeat the past or because current situations and immediate demands preoccupy them. For clients who are oriented toward the past or present, meaningful career counseling must start by helping them to envision the future and to believe that they have a place in it. If they cannot learn to foresee the future and use that vision as a context for career planning, then they may conclude that career counseling wastes their time.

Counselors can use time perspective interventions to teach clients that they have a future. Clients who are oriented toward the past can learn that the future need not repeat the past. Clients who are oriented toward the present can learn that they have a future. Clients who are oriented toward the future can learn to make the future more meaningful by populating it with anticipated events.

THE CIRCLES TEST

Description

One particularly effective time perspective intervention builds on Cottle's (1967) Circles Test. When taking the Circles Test, people draw three circles that represent their past, present, and future. Cottle devised

the test to assess which time dimension dominates an individual's time perspective and how that individual relates the time dimensions. Circle size indicates the relative primacy of the time dimensions and placement of the circles indicates how the time dimensions relate to each other. In addition to assessing temporal dominance and relatedness, counselors can use the Circles Test to improve the time perspective of individuals or groups. The time perspective intervention based on the Circles Test is divided into three phases that correspond to three aspects of the psychological experience of time: orientation, differentiation, and integration. The following description of each phase includes goals, rationale, and procedures as well as supplementary activities that can be included as part of the intervention or used as follow-up activities.

Operation Phase

Goals

The goals are to induce or increase future orientation, and to foster optimism about the future.

Rationale

People use their conceptions of the past, present, and future as perspectives that can be adopted or dropped. Each perspective contributes something different to life quality.

Thinking about the future raises concern about survival in the future. Work is the response that reduces this anxiety because it aims to improve the future. Being in the present can give rise to play because play is for the nonce, it has no future goal beyond immediate enjoyment. Reflecting on the past gives knowledge about self and the world. A good life requires that people learn from the past, enjoy the present, and prepare for the future. People who can comfortably shift perspectives from present to future and back again are more likely to balance work and play. If people rigidly use one perspective to view everything, then they restrict themselves. For example, people who are stuck in the present play too much, whereas people who are stuck in the future work too much. When it comes to career planning, the appropriate time perspective is a future orientation. An orientation to the past or present impairs decisiveness and realism in career choice and planning.

Procedures

1. Provide clients with a blank sheet of paper. Give them the Circles Test instructions:

   Think of the past, present, and future as being in the shape of

circles. Now arrange these circles in any way you want that best shows how you feel about the relationship of the past, the present, and the future. You may use different size circles. When you have finished, label each circle to show which one is the past, which one the present, and which one the future (Cottle, 1967, p. 60).

2. Help clients explore what their circles mean. During this discussion, reinforce any client statements that indicate the future is important or that they are optimistic about the future. Convince clients that effective career choice and planning require an orientation to the future. Encourage clients to make career decisions based on future outcomes, not on present preferences or past habits. Use the following prompts to guide individual self-exploration or group discussion:

Co: What were you thinking about as you drew the circles?

What do their relative sizes mean to you?

Describe a recent choice you have made and identify the time dimension you focused on while making that decision.

Use three words to describe how you feel about your past, your present, and your future.

Define work and play. Compare and contrast them.

How will your (future) adult life be different from that of your parents? How will the world be different from the way it is now?

Supplemental Activities

1. Explicitly discussing clients' attitudes toward career choice can increase their future orientation. One method for doing this is to discuss clients' responses to the Career Maturity Inventory Attitude Scale (Crites, 1978). In particular, teaching clients the rationale for mature responses to items in the orientation and involvement subscales induces a future orientation. The items in these subscales address awareness of the occupational future and inclination to prepare for it. Savickas (in press) describes a three-step cycle for item discussion that can be used to induce or increase a future orientation through nondirective exploration to examine a client's thoughts about an item, directive shaping to develop future orientation, and active learning to reaffirm a future orientation.

2. Help clients generalize what they have learned about future orientation to other areas of concern such as diets or school grades. Weight loss requires a future orientation in present decision making about food choices. Sayings such as "a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips" convey the wisdom of a future-oriented approach to eating. Academic achievement also rests on delayed gratification. Students who do not envision a future have little incentive to study now for rewards tomorrow.

Differentiation Phase

Goals

The goals are to make the future feel real, reinforce positive attitudes toward planning, and prompt goal setting.

Rationale

Time differentiation refers to the density and extension of events within a time dimension. The more events that populate a time dimension and the farther these events extend, the more that time dimension seems real to an individual. A person who densely populates the future with anticipated events projected far into the horizon has a cognitive schema ready for career planning. A differentiated future provides a meaningful context for setting personal goals. It also alleviates anxiety about the future because a person can envision her or his place in it. Identifying anticipated events also allows people to plan on and prepare for the events, thus enhancing their adaptability.

Procedures

1. Ask clients to make a list of responses to two questions: "who will you be?" and "what will you do?" (Kastenbaum, 1961).
2. After clients have completed this task, ask them to list ten events that might happen to them in the future (Wallace, 1956).
3. When clients have listed ten events, ask them to indicate the age they would be when each event might occur and to place a mark next to the events over which they have some control.
4. Assist clients to assess the density and extension of their futures. Begin with density by counting the number of responses to the two questions about "what will you be" and "what will you do." Then have clients score extension by identifying which of the ten

events extends farthest into the future. You may also have clients determine the average extension of events by calculating the mean age of anticipated events.

5. Explain to clients why future differentiation is important in career and life planning. Provide clients with feedback about their differentiation, both density and extension. Explore client reactions to this feedback. If clients have adequate differentiation, then proceed to the integration phase of this intervention. If clients' future vista seems undifferentiated, then continue the intervention with the following activity.
6. On a blank sheet of paper, draw a straight line and mark the left end with the word "birth" and the right end with the word "death." Ask clients to view this line as their life. Mark a spot on the line to represent the age at which clients will graduate or have graduated from high school. Then ask clients to indicate on the line their responses to the "what will you be and do" questions and the ten events that they foresee happening to themselves. Then ask them to insert any of the following events that they have omitted and the age at which the event might occur: obtain first full-time job, buy a new car, finish college or training, enjoy life your way, take a long vacation, get married, own first home, move to bigger home, first child born, last child born, last child in grade school, first child gets married, establish self in permanent job, get promoted, think about midcareer change, be hospitalized, a friend dies, become a grandparent, plan for retirement, retire, and move to smaller home.
7. Discuss clients' life lines and identify any implicit assumptions that they seem to hold about the future. Draw brackets on clients' life lines to demarcate the life stages of growth (birth–14), exploration (15–24), early adulthood (25–45), middle adulthood (45–64), and late adulthood (65–death). Teach clients that the lives of most people follow a predictable course through these stages. During each life stage people share similar situations, demands, pressures, concerns, and problems. People who anticipate tasks that they will face have time to prepare to meet them. When they do encounter the tasks, they master them and thereby increase their life success and satisfaction.
8. Once clients envision the future in general, they can dream of a personal future. As noted in a perfume commercial, "dreams are where we design our lives." Tell clients to view their life line as a skeleton that they should flesh out with specific, personal details. Ask them to write an imaginative history of their futures entitled "My Future Autobiography" (Maw, 1982). If time does not

permit the writing of a full autobiography, then counselors can abbreviate the activity by asking clients to focus their personal scenarios on just two points in the future, for example, a day five and a day ten years hence.

9. When clients have written their future autobiographies, counselors can help clients further differentiate these personal scenarios by making them denser and extending them farther into the future. Counselors may also direct clients to examine the goals in their future autobiographies and to restate abstract or ambiguous goals in terms that are more achievable ("I can do it"), believable ("I want to do it"), controllable ("I do not need the help of others to achieve it"), and concrete ("I will objectively know when I have done it").

Supplemental Activities

1. Ask students to write down the important events that they expect will occur during the school year. Given the initial list, help students differentiate and extend their lists. Students who envision more events and who anticipate events farther into the school year will probably earn higher grades and like school more.
2. Helping people learn the course of a typical life enables them to think about the progress of their own lives. Media presentations make good discussion stimuli for this topic. Many popular movies deal with life stages. Counselors may use excerpts from old movies such as *Saturday Night Fever*, *Down to the Sea in Ships*, and *Peggy Sue Got Married*. Art and music also provide appropriate stimuli. For example, Thomas Cole's paintings that deal with time's passing and its continuity (e.g., *Voyage of Life* series) prompt discussion about life stages, as does Christopher Bertelli's sixteenth-century copper engraving *The Seven Ages of Man*. Emily Lou Harris's *Sally Rose* song cycle may serve the same purpose. A film that presents Marcel Marceau's (1975) mime of Shakespeare's seven ages of people, *Youth, Maturity, Old Age, and Death*, similarly focuses discussion on life stages.
3. Rather than using media excerpts to stimulate guided discussion about life stages, counselors may use resources that directly teach about life stages. For example, an animated movie called *Everybody Rides the Carousel* (Hubley & Hubley, 1975) teaches Erikson's model of the life cycle. Reading and reflecting upon Sheehy's (1976) *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* also facilitates future differentiation.

4. Teaching about career stages, as opposed to life stages, also can be effective. The Adult Career Concerns Inventory (Super, Thompson, & Lindeman, 1988) operationally defines four major career stages with sixty developmental tasks that most people will encounter as they develop their careers. The tasks are listed in chronological order so individuals can determine how far they have come, where they are, and what comes next. Thus, the inventory provides a superb lesson plan for teaching individuals or groups about careers and the vocational development tasks that they may face in the near and distant future.

Integration Phase

Goals

Goals for the integration phase are to link present behavior to future outcomes, practice planning skills, and heighten career awareness.

Rationale

Orientation makes the future important, and differentiation makes the future meaningful. Time integration makes the future seem controllable. Temporal integration refers to the relatedness of time dimensions. Conceptualizing relations among the past, present, and future provides clients with a cognitive schema that enables them to make plans for achieving their goals. The schema allows people to impose direction on their vocational behavior which, according to Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman (1990), is the essence of a subjective career. Enacting contingent plans empowers purposeful action directed toward goal attainment.

Procedures

1. Ask clients to look at their Circles Test while you explain how time dimensions can relate. Remind clients that circle size represents time orientation and that number of events represents time differentiation. Then explain that the relative placement of the circles represents the following four types of time relatedness:
   a. Circles that do not touch indicate *isolation* of time dimensions. This view of time means that people cannot do anything in the present to improve their futures.
   b. Circles that touch but do not overlap indicate *connection* of time dimensions and a linear flow of discrete events. This view of time means that events follow one another yet each

remains distinct and independent. Events can be sequenced but not controlled.

c. Circles that partially overlap indicate *association* of time dimensions. This view of time means that the present has been inherent in the past and the future is inherent in the present. The area where the present and future circles overlap represents the time zone in which people can foretaste their futures and can act to shape future outcomes.

d. Circles that totally overlap indicate the *integration* of time dimensions. When people draw the past and future circles within the present circle, they realize that only the present exists and that, in the present, they remember the past and anticipate the future. This panoramic view of the present envisions the three dimensions that St. Augustine first identified: the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future.

2. Understanding the association of the past and present provides self-knowledge that is important in career decision making. Help clients who drew isolated circles to envision how the past overlaps with the present by identifying past events that continue to influence their present situations, choices, and concerns. One way to show time association is to identify life themes with the technique of functional self-analysis (Haldane, 1975). In functional self-analysis, clients learn about themselves from their past successes, not their mistakes. Clients list ten specific accomplishments that they have both done well and enjoyed doing. Then clients analyze each accomplishment to determine the needs met and the skills used. After identifying needs and skills for each of the ten events, clients organize the results and, with the help of a counselor, identify and discuss their continuing pattern of needs and skills. Counselors may reinforce clients' newly articulated sense of identity by relating it to the present and future. The pattern can be related to the present by asking clients to give examples of things they have done during the current week that exemplify their continuing pattern. The pattern can be related to the future by explaining why individuals should choose an occupation that manifests their continuing pattern and implements their vocational identity.

3. Explain that people control their futures through actions in the time zone where the present and future circles overlap. The more people plan their actions in this time zone, the more likely they will achieve their goals. Persuade clients of the wisdom of

the "5 Ps": *p*rior *p*lanning *p*revents *p*oor *p*erformance. Point out that when people enact plans, they begin to feel the future emerging. Convince clients that the three rules of success are prepare, prepare, and prepare.

4. Tell clients what constitutes a good plan. A plan is an anticipated series of activities or path that leads to a goal. A path is contingent if success at one step on the path is needed to guarantee the opportunity to engage in the next step. If success at a step has no bearing on the next step, then the path is noncontingent. People who construct contingent paths to goals are more realistic and achieve better results.
5. Show clients an example of a contingent path to a career goal. For example, a contingent path to the occupational goal of physician may include the following steps: study hard in college, do well in courses, apply to medical school, get accepted into medical school, work hard in basic science courses, pass the courses, impress clerkship instructors, choose a medical specialty, apply to residencies, graduate from medical school, obtain a residency, succeed in residency, earn medical license, and set up practice.
6. Use the Future Plans Questionnaire (Pearlson & Raynor, 1982) to teach planning skills. Start by asking clients to select an occupational (or other life) goal for which they would like to construct a plan.
7. Give clients 15 blank sheets of paper and tell them to view each sheet as a "Step Page." Ask clients to think about the steps they must take to reach the goal they are using for this activity. Tell clients to write on each page a distinct step that they plan to engage in, the positive outcome of that activity, and any negative outcome that might occur. Explain that they should write only steps that require attainment of the positive outcome to continue along the path. When they have finished the Step Pages, ask clients to check their steps to make sure that they are sequenced in a contingent path.
8. When clients have completed their paths, analyze the steps to make sure that they are contingent. Next, discuss the plans and revise them if necessary. Revision could include making a step more specific and detailed, adding steps to further differentiate the future, making the plan more comprehensive, and building in alternatives.
9. Discuss achievement standards for each step in the path. Steps

on the contingent path define *what* they will do. Now ask clients to consider *how* well they will perform each step. Encourage effort and discuss why they should strive to do their best as they execute their plans. Review the steps in their plans and underline, in red ink, words that directly (e.g., good, better, best) and indirectly (e.g., earn, strive, responsible) indicate concern about quality. For steps that lack quality standards, use the red pen to add words that arouse the need for achievement.

10. Conclude the intervention by generalizing clients' newly gained planning skills to other goals. Teach clients that they need a plan for every important goal they set for themselves. Goals without plans are unlikely to be achieved.

Supplemental Activities

1. Hopkins (1977) described a brief exercise that shows clients how to overlap the present and the future time dimensions.

> I list five things that I need to do by Monday (these tend to be urgent) and then five things that I want to do during my lifetime (these tend to be important). My next task is to combine the lists into one imperative list of things both important and urgent. I can get at a big important thing by making a small part of it urgent (p. 2).

2. Games designed to increase time relatedness work well with high school students. "When I Grow Up I'm Going to Be Married" (Staff, 1972) is a game that illustrates how time and circumstances affect women. Ten girls can play at a time. Each girl is given a profile with four facts about her marriage, childbearing, education, and death. Participants are each asked to design an "ideal life" around her four facts and to indicate at which periods in her life she will be doing what. After each girl has designed "her" life, she is given a list of problems that occurred in her life. She must then cope with each problem and analyze how better planning might have prevented the problem or increased her ability to adapt to the problems. The "Life Career Game" (Boocock, 1967) provides a similar yet more structured experience in planning for the future.

LEARNING TO MAKE TIME PERSPECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

You may develop skill in applying the time perspective intervention by engaging in the following activities:

1. Evaluate your own time perspective. Do the exercises yourself and discuss the results with a friend or colleague.
2. Practice the time perspective intervention on counselors or students before you use it with clients. Ask these counselors or students to give you honest feedback about the intervention and the way you did it.
3. Familiarize yourself with the other time perspective interventions by reading *Learning for Tomorrow: The Role of the Future in Education* (Toffler, 1974)
4. Identify the time perspective of the organizational culture in the institution where you work (Ringle & Savickas, 1983) and consider how it influences your daily behavior and career plans.
5. Study the psychology of time by reading the references included in the foregoing discussion.
6. Learn more about the philosophy, history, and social meaning of time by reading such books as *Man and Time* (Priestley, 1989) and *Time: Rhythm and Response* (von Franz, 1978).

SUMMARY

Time perspective can be altered to increase future orientation, populate the future with probable events and personal goals, and link present behavior to future outcomes. Counselors who use time perspective interventions with their clients aim to make the future important, cause the future to seem real, and create hope that goals can be achieved. Clients with an extensive vista on the future display greater career awareness, more optimism, and increased motivation for life planning. The planning attitudes and skills that result from time perspective interventions may also generalize to empower individuals as they plan for other life roles.

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